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Open Learning Systems: Unlocking innovation

David Price

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Introduction

The worst of times...

We are in the middle of a global profusion of angst and hand-wringing when it comes to the current state of education. The prime source of anxiety is seen as international benchmarking, leading to a newly identified condition: PISA hysteria. Test score comparisons, however, do not solely account for the strident calls for action voiced by politicians and policy makers. Increasingly, our children are seen as 'at risk', with global rises in bullying[1] (especially cyberbullying), violence[2] and youth suicides.[3] Embattled educators face heightened pressure from the impact of high-stakes accountability, leading to concerns of unfilled school Principal vacancies, and 'churn rates' of 50 per cent of new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years.

The best of times...

The various forms of social media have facilitated the free exchange of knowledge on an unprecedented scale. A 16 year-old student invents a cheap bio-marker for pancreatic cancer, outsmarting medical research institutes. An 8 year-old from rural India becomes junior world golf champion, with no formal coaching, but with access to YouTube. Millennials are acknowledged to be the most socially-conscious generation since World War Two.

Both of these descriptors – best of times/worst of times – have validity when applied to the first fifteen years of the 21st century. The critical difference is the context. The sources of anxiety are predominantly found in our schools and colleges. Learning here is formal, expert-to-novice, under intense scrutiny and

professionalised. The vibrancy of the second scenario is largely because here learning is informal, social, non-hierarchical, unsupervised and 'open'.

My argument, here and in my 2013 book, *OPEN: How We'll Work, Live and Learn in the Future*, is that the political, organisational and philosophical discourse surrounding formal learning is becoming ever further detached from the lessons we see when learning happens outside formal boundaries. This detachment,

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I believe, is reaching a crisis point, whereby the consumers and stakeholders involved in formal learning are actively looking to informal solutions. The grades that individual students receive for their school projects matter little compared to the comments found on their blogs, or their Vimeo accounts. Rising numbers of parents, frustrated by the worksheet culture of their child's classrooms, are self-organising and co-creating local home-learning networks. Teachers are taking to Twitter and TeachMeets to create informal self-help professional learning networks.

The missing conversation?

My reason for writing 'OPEN' was to try to address two gaping holes in the debates around educational transformation. Perhaps 'transformation' is something of a misnomer: at best, the development of educational policy is incremental; at worst, it is a political pendulum that swings back and forth, without any forward movement, constrained by ideology.

The two holes, the two missing conversations, are as follows:

1. The revolution in how we now work

According to social forecasts in the US,[4] UK and Australia, the point at which our labour market has more freelancers than employees is between 5–10 years away. The growing automation of knowledge work means that we are expected to lose around 2 billion jobs by 2030.[5] Today's university graduates are facing what has been termed a 'high skills/low income' future (Brown et al, 2011). The recent rapid growth in 'knowledge process outsourcing' – the breaking up of salaried jobs into bid-for tasks, through websites like Elance.com and Freelancer.com – may well be transforming economies of developing countries like India, but it is causing futurists in the west to predict 'the end of job'. Despite this, as I write these words, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, is making a speech outlining Conservative plans for 'full employment', as if such a thing were ever going to be possible again.

The early warning signs of the high-skills/low-income future can be seen in the appearance of two new labels: 'mal-employment' – 2013 saw a 36 per cent rise in degree-holders working in jobs that do not require a degree; and 'underemployment' – graduates who are working fewer hours than they wish to work. In Australia, currently, 30 per cent of young people are either unemployed or underemployed; in Britain, it's 40 per cent.

I have yet to find a speech from Education Secretaries of State in the UK, US or Australia asking how formal education can respond to this radically altered work landscape. It is as though the Global Financial Crisis never happened; as if artificial intelligence were still the province of science fiction; as if degrees were still a guarantee of a job; as if 'outsourcing' only applied to call centre jobs.

2. The revolution in how we now learn

It is perhaps a measure of how open our learning has become, that the exchange of knowledge among anybody with an internet connection, has become ubiquitous. Much of it may have once been frivolous: pictures of cats playing the piano and the like. But now it ranges from the personal/professional, through blogging and other forms of social media, to the political. The phenomenal success of campaign groups like Avaaz[6] and 38 Degrees[7] give the lie to the stereotype of young people who are politically disengaged.

The learning which is taking place socially is also purposeful: we have more control over our lives now, and we learn so that we can collectively take action. The #illridewithyou campaign, where Sydneysiders offered to accompany muslim commuters in the aftermath of the 2014 Sydney siege, points to the potency of socially activist learning – it is often driven by values and humanitarian concern.

Because socially-connected learning has crept up on us, we have not seen it for the true revolution that it represents. In addition, although high-profile examples of abuse are often scandalised in popular media, the value of peer-to-peer informal learning is absent from policy discussions on education.

Back to basics

Instead of a forward-focused public discussion on the challenges of the labour market, or the opportunities presented by informal learning, what we have seen and heard from politicians and policy-makers tends to be a nostalgic desire to return to the certainty of 'the basics'. Such nostalgia is bolstered by the PISA performance of countries favouring traditional pedagogies (whilst neatly avoiding the inefficiency of learning systems that, in order to be successful, require students to work longer hours than 19th century English child factory hands).

While this myopic and somewhat irrelevant argument takes place, the gulf in motivation between the learning that our students **have** to do, and the learning that they **choose** to do, grows ever wider. Meanwhile, the implementation of standardised testing and high-stakes accountability leaves a devastating legacy of 'side effects' (Zhao, 2012): increasing student (and staff) disengagement; perceived irrelevance of formal education; and the loss of autonomy and trust in the teaching profession.

It is my contention that, if we want to re-engage learners, re-professionalise teachers, and re-think how we prepare students for a globally competitive working life, we need to follow the learners, and develop more open learning systems.

The irrepressible rise of informal collaboration and communication

One of the defining shifts of the past decade has been the dominance of social and informal communications. The range of contributing factors includes:

- a loss of deference towards authority;
- the uncovering of layperson expertise; and, of course,
- the technological shifts in our use of media – we now consume **and** produce.

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Of these, the latter may be the most significant, but I would argue that it does not tell the whole story. Did Facebook reach one billion users

simply because the technology made it easier to share, or is there a deeper underlying driver? I suggest that it is about the **social**, more than the media. At a time when our trust in the pillars of society – police, politicians, media and the banking system, to name but four – has crumbled, we have re-discovered trust in ourselves. To take one example, the 'sharing economy' (think airb'n'b, eBay, couchsurfing.com, Uber et al) is estimated to be worth between $26bn and $100bn annually (Botsman and Rogers, 2010) and growing fast. It would never have existed without the value placed upon **reputational capital** (how well we are trusted).

Similarly Wikipedia's first incarnation, Nupedia, relied upon the authority of academic experts to provide quality control for Jimmy Wales' first attempt at an online encyclopedia. After months of peer-review, only a handful of articles had appeared on Nupedia. Wales decision to 'go open' not only allowed Wikipedia to flourish, it led to the emergence of the 'pro-am' (an amateur who possesses professional levels of expertise). The initial academic concerns over the reliability of information in wikipedia articles have now largely dissipated, assuaged by an army of volunteers, who correct over half the cases of 'vandalism' in less than four minutes. It is a powerful example of a self-correcting organism. The story of Nupedia and Wikipedia points to a profound shift in the direction in which knowledge travels. Until relatively recently, knowledge only ever trickled down. Now it spreads laterally.

At least, it does in the social space. In formal centres of learning, old habits die hard.

The contextual differences between 'open' learning which happens socially, and 'enclosed' learning in more formal settings (eg, school, college, work), are striking (see Table 1).

The tension between these different modes of learning is becoming untenable. Today's students often have more computing power in their pockets, on their mobile phones, than the PCs in the out-dated computer lab – but they are usually prevented from using it. The students' personal learning networks of friends, forum

Table 1. Open learning (learning socially) compared with learning in more formal settings

Learning in School, College & Work	Learning Socially
Formal: When, where, how and with whom is pre-determined	**Informal:** We learn when, where, with whom, and how we please
Individual: We demonstrate our understanding and skills alone	**Social:** We study, and demonstrate our understanding, in groups
Linear: Learners follow a sequential program, according to the 'curriculum'	**Non-linear:** Learners follow non-sequential routes, according to interests
Just in case: Knowledge acquisition precedes actions	**Just in time:** Knowledge is gained as the task demands
Tutor-to-student: One expert, few learners	**Networked:** The expertise is in the crowd
Transmissive: Teacher transmits, (usually through lectures), students receive	**Experiential:** Meaning is made, and shared, by experience

users, Twitter followers and Facebook friends provide a rich source of knowledge gathering when they are at home – but use of such networks is excluded from their classrooms – little wonder that teachers experience immense frustration in trying to keep their students' attention.

If we wish to see a rise in the proportion of students who class themselves as engaged in school, I think we have little option but to build better understanding of how they are learning outside school and take account of that in our learning and teaching practice. There are (at least) six powerful motivations fuelling learning socially. I call them the Six 'Do-Its' and explain them as follows.

1. Do-It-Yourself

Clay Shirky (Shirky, 2008) identified the rise in mass online collaboration, speculating that, in the future, such collaboration would extend from 'knowing about' into 'taking action'. He did not have long to wait. Organisations like Ushahidi.com use open source technologies to bring little-known social and political issues to a global audience. They are 'working towards a world where open, effective and participatory governance is the norm, not the exception'. Such intermediaries are democratising learning by removing entry barriers and making it active and empowering.

2. Do-It-Now

The immediacy that is seen when Tweets or videos go viral is both motivating and reinforcing. One explanation for Twitter addiction can be seen in the reward system that affects the brain. Investigating the impact of addictive drugs, a senior neuroscientist (Wise, 2004) found that the reward of dopamine release helps 'stamp in' memories and increase motivation. Could this explain why the pleasure experienced, when we get an immediate response to a request for information on Twitter, makes it such a motivating learning

environment? Lillian Katz (Katz and Chard, 2000) has long argued that learning which has immediacy, solving problems just-in-time, has 'horizontal relevance'. Katz suggests that this kind of learning is more motivating than its opposite – 'vertical relevance' (just-in-case). Katz's assertions, made before the advent of social media, are even more applicable today, given the style of learning that dominates in the social space.

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3. Do-It-With-Friends

The ability to choose our collaborators is a key freedom hallmarking social learning. Personal learning communities are built upon collegiality and fluidity, with groups coming together around their personal passions and professional interests. Such freedoms are all but absent in most schools.

4. Do-It-For-Fun

Projects, forums and social movements are often marked by a sense of playfulness. Fun alone, however, is insufficient to maintain a learning community. 'Serious gaming' has flourished because it combines enjoyment with challenge – what Seymour Papert calls 'hard fun' – in the pursuit of purposeful activity.

5. Do-Unto-Others

The technological vehicles for social learning are morally neutral, merely reflecting the values and actions of the participants. Inevitably, much is made of the malevolent use of social media in the mainstream media: cyberbullying; youth radicalisation, trolling and the like. However, mainstream media rarely report the million random acts of kindness that occur on forums, media aggregators and knowledge sharing sites. Relatively little is heard of organisations

like DoSomething.org – a global movement of 3.3 million young people dedicated to 'making the world suck less'. Their members have recycled 4.3 million pairs of jean for young homeless people, collected mobile/cell phones for domestic violence survivors, baked cakes for infants in Syria, hosted dance classes for seniors (anyone over 25 is officially 'old' on DoSomething) – weren't the Millennials supposed to be the 'Me Me Me Generation'?

6. Do-It-For-The-World-To-See

Perhaps this is the most contestable of the six motivations of social learning, due to the number of young people who do, or say, stupid things without thinking of the consequences of highly public sharing. Their numbers are only exceeded by the number of adults who say or do even stupider things. The pressures of keeping students safe frequently overwhelms the benefits of authentic public assessment of their work. Most societies teach their children to cross the road safely; we do not ban cars – yet that seems to be the equivalent strategy when it comes to digital safety. As a result, the contrast between the strictly enclosed audience for student work in school, with the open, global audience their work enjoys when they are at home, inevitably makes school work seem dull by comparison.

It is not hard to see that these 'Do-It's appear far more frequently in social, informal learning than they do in our schools and colleges. This goes some way to explaining the rise of disengagement in school, and presents unenviable challenges for teachers. Yet, as we shall see, schools who have opened their learning environments and integrated these motivations into their learning programs are not only enhancing engagement – they are preparing their students for the adaptive, entrepreneurial future that awaits them. In short, they have realised that the best way to **prepare** young people for the world beyond school is to **immerse** them in the world beyond school, as often as possible.

The New Learning Ecosystem

The motivations described above are just some of the challenges facing everyone who works in schools, colleges and work-based learning. Indeed, it could be argued that the formal/informal divide is even more pronounced in the workplace, where global employee engagement figures are 13 per cent and autonomy and trust have halved in the past four decades.

There are, however, striking examples of highly innovative companies that have reversed these patterns and become highly successful. There are schools and colleges that have done the same. If we want to re-think learning to better prepare our students, we have to shift our own adult and professional learning.

Open Professional Learning

Cathy Davidson (2011) and Marcia Conner (Conner and Bingham, 2010) have written convincingly of the power of online mass collaboration, and the 'New Social Learning'. While social etiquettes and protocols are still being worked out, it is clear that the popularity of Twitter, Yammer and the like signals a fundamental shift in knowledge management. It is one that has profound implications for workers, particularly knowledge workers, who now want to 'hack' their professional development and so direct their own learning. This shift does not just occur in virtual spaces: the exponential growth of TeachMeets (highly social gatherings of teachers) and the shift towards 'un-conferences' suggest that educators want more control over not just **what** they learn, but also **how** they learn it.

While these are still nascent trends (it is estimated that fewer than 10 per cent of teachers use Twitter, for example) there is a growing desire to have more self-determination in workplace learning. It therefore poses real challenges for CEOs, Principals and learning managers alike. How do you 'manage' self-determined learning? Can staff be trusted to develop new skills by themselves?

Sceptical school administrators and superintendents could gain reassurance from one of the early pioneers of open professional learning – Xerox's Eureka Project. In the early 1990s, photocopier engineers were observed to rely less upon the repair manual for help and guidance, and more upon the use of 2-way radios to contact more experienced colleagues. Fearing important new knowledge would stay locked in the heads of a few individuals, an on-line forum was set up, and management incentivised engineers to share tips, with a $25 bonus per tip. The workers rejected this incentive, arguing that this would generate quantity, not quality. All they requested was recognition for proposing the tip. This early form of reputational capital had the desired effect, and over 50,000 tips were self-generated before Xerox rolled out the forum across their global operations.

The growing community of educational practice leaders, who are collaborating across continents,[8] should be viewed as a self-improving asset, not a challenge to be feared. I know of Australian teachers who are well-respected around the world as innovators and networkers, but that expertise is neither known about, nor shared, within their own school. Education still remains, essentially, a private world. The de-privatisation of teaching is long overdue, and the opening up of professional learning now being observed, is to be welcomed.

Open Innovation

The Innovation Unit is currently working in partnership with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) on an innovation program, Learning Frontiers.[9] In helping to form innovation hubs we have encouraged membership of those hubs to be as broad as possible: entrepreneurs working in education, edu-tech companies, not-for-profit groups, parent associations, etc. Our rationale is that, in many private and public sectors, organisations can no longer rely on their internal intellectual capital for new ideas.

We are witnessing a profusion of 'crowdsourcing' initiatives from companies like Proctor and Gamble (P&G), who, despite a research and development capability of over 9,000 staff, found themselves unable to keep up with the rate of innovation that would sustain their competitiveness. Their solution has been 'Connect and Develop', whereby any innovator or entrepreneur can pitch an idea for a new product to P&G, and, if accepted, become a partner. Over half of all P&G's new innovations now come through Connect and Develop, and their company motto is now 'Proudly Found Elsewhere'.

Twenty years ago, there were virtually no examples in the corporate world of open innovation – intellectual property was closely guarded in a desire to gain a competitive advantage. Whilst there are still plenty of examples of closed innovation, they are being matched – some would say overtaken – by open innovation companies.

To what extent are schools crowdsourcing innovation? How many look beyond education for inspiration? Where are the deep partnerships with parents, community groups and employers?

The schools taking part in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)'s Learning Frontiers program are opening up in order to innovate, as illustrated in the following examples.

- 75 students from Birdwood High School in the Adelaide Hills worked with local community members, businesses and organisations to raise the $80,000 needed to convert the obsolete film projectors in the Lobethal Cinema to the digital equipment that is now mandatory for survival. The cinema had been closed since December 2013. Students elected to undertake specific roles during the project (as journalists, catering coordinators, publicity and marketing, website developers, sound and tech crew, comperes, front of house staff,

artists, musicians, historians) and each group worked with an expert in that field, including 'Shine' film director Scott Hicks. One of the main briefs was not just to raise the immediate shortfall in revenue but to activate the local community so everybody felt a sense of ownership, which would increase the sustainability of the cinema well into the future. The students organised a 'closing night' (where film was shown for the very last time), a music festival and a cabaret evening. The fundraising target has now been reached, the digital equipment has been ordered, and the students have been asked by the official cinema committee to assist with the preparations for the re-opening.

■ Toorak College, in Victoria, has been inspired by Google's 20 per cent 'free time' for employees, where staff are free to work on their own projects. Middle Years students were showing a noticeable dip in engagement, so teachers have carved out 10 per cent of learning time for students to follow their own interests. 'Cre8' has been carefully researched, noting that responsibility for, and motivation in, learning rises significantly when students follow their interests.

■ Also in Victoria, students at Wooranna Park Primary school work on 'Enigma Missions', seeking out expertise from around the world, to 'deeply research' their passions. Palaeontologists, DNA scientists, autism consultants are just some of the interviewees who have provided real-world connections. Senior students from Mt Eliza school have also peer taught their younger students.

Such isolated examples can be seen in many schools anywhere in the globe. The difference with schools taking part in Learning Frontiers is that they not only co-design their innovations, they also share a commitment to diffuse them to the wider education sector.

How OPEN learning systems can transform education

The recent history of education policy in western developed countries – with the possible exception of Finland – could be summarised as short-termist and output-driven. Command-and-control (and few sectors of public life are subject to as much command-and-control as education) deprives school leaders of the ownership of their destiny and how they will be judged. They live or die by their students' performance in standardised tests, not their long-term ability to be adaptive, lifelong, employable learners.

The defenders of these strategies argue that high-stakes accountability need not come at the expense of creativity or entrepreneurship. As Yong Zhao (2013) has argued, however, the way in which these strategies are implemented does indeed stifle the very skills and qualities our young people will need for the future described earlier. In addition, aside from the law of diminishing returns of cranking the levers of accountability ever harder, and raising the bar of targets ever higher, such strategies also come with significant side effects. Psychologist Barry Schwartz foresaw the inevitable consequence of a target-driven culture in a talk to TED employees in 2010. Citing a clearly imaginary teacher, 'Ms Dewey' he observed:

Ms Dewey's a teacher in a Texas elementary school. She found herself listening to a consultant one day who was trying to help teachers boost the test scores of the kids, so that the school would reach the élite category in percentage of kids passing big tests. All these schools in Texas compete with one another to achieve these milestones, and there are bonuses and various other treats that come if you beat the other schools. So here was the consultant's advice: first, don't waste your time on kids who are going to pass the test no matter what you do.

Second, don't waste your time on kids who can't pass the test no matter what you do. Third, don't waste your time on kids who moved into the district too late for their scores to be counted. Focus all of your time and attention on the kids who are on the bubble, the so-called 'bubble kids' – kids where your intervention can get them just maybe over the line from failing to passing. So Ms. Dewey heard this, and she shook her head in despair.

(Schwartz, 2010)

During the intervening five years, numbers of schools have been reprimanded for a range of 'test crimes': from 'over-aiding' their students to altering papers. Hundreds of schools in the US, Australia and the UK have been accused of 'cheating' to bolster test scores. Many of those who admitted their guilt cited a well-intentioned desire to reverse the 'Why try?' blight of low expectations from kids from poor backgrounds, while others blamed the intense internal pressure to improve attainment. Hard-working teachers become vilified in the media. Schwartz sees it differently – for him the teachers are in danger of being 'de-moral-ised', losing their moral compass in a desperate choice between keeping their school, or their student's life-chances, alive. The late management guru, W E Deming, once said that making everyone accountable for their performance was 'ridiculous' (see a collection of Deming's writing, published in 2012), and invited corruption: 'It's human nature - give me a target, and I'll hit it'. In the UK, demoralisation could almost be seen as unintended consequence: shortly after his appointment as the Government's Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Willshaw said 'If anyone says to you that staff morale is at an all-time low you will know you are doing something right.[10] In February 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron further turned the screws by announcing[11] that over 3,000 schools in England, which had until recently

been judged as 'satisfactory', would now risk having new leadership imposed – this at a time when the shortage of school leader applications has already reached near-crisis levels.

Perhaps the biggest side-effect of such target-driven strategies is that schools, and school leaders, inevitably become fearful, turn inwards and see other schools in their district, not as potential collaborators, but as competitors.

In the world that I outlined at the start of this paper, where the rapid demand for innovation and change is accompanied by a radically-altered notion of 'work' and employable skills, how could we possibly be satisfied with policies which urge us to look 'back-to-basics', or East, to PISA-topping nations who themselves have already acknowledged their need for creativity and innovation in their education systems?

I would argue that, having adopted 19th century industrial management models of schooling, and having seen a flatlining of achievement over the past decade, it is now time to learn from the successes of the world's most innovative companies, who have harnessed the wisdom of the crowd and, from the power of social collaboration, through looking 'outside-in'. In short, we should make our learning systems 'open'.

Going Open

Opening learning demands that schools see themselves as integral to their local communities, and that students do work that matters, contributing to the social good. Open learning engages parents in conversations about the nature of learning, not just the number of grades. It recognises that, as Sri Aurobindo remarked, 'the mind must be consulted in its own growth'; students need to become, not just meta-cognitive learners, but also co-designers – at least in part – of their own learning and the learning of others.

Open learning systems apply the same learning principles to their professionals as they do to their students. They eschew 'stand-and-deliver' for study groups, understanding that the only sustainable transformation in education has to be owned by the people who have to implement it: teachers. They have high expectations of the profession's capacity to learn through transparent, shared practice, and of their ability to rise to additional responsibilities. They have the humility to accept that learning now happens everywhere, anytime, and they work hard to integrate informal learning into the formal environment.

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Open learning systems, in the workplace, and in the formal learning space, share common characteristics.

1. They place an emphasis upon innovation through collaboration. For Professor David H Hargreaves, 'Professional development and partnership competence are the soil in which collaborative capital grows' (Hargreaves, 2012). Innovation will flourish if it is 'disintermediated': shorn of the externally imposed agendas and intermediaries that invite resistance and that de-professionalise teaching. It will also flourish if professional learning is collegial and self-determined. In an open learning system, teachers open up the classroom, not just welcoming colleagues, but also the range of entrepreneurs, technologists and industrialists who thus increase their investment in the future of the school, while at the same time connecting learners to the adult world.

2. Learning systems should have low-entry barriers and be inclusive, welcoming diversity They acknowledge that effective learning happens when knowledge is not seen as a finite resource, to be guarded jealously, but freely exchanged in cultures where vested interests and copyright are minimised. Open learning systems practice 'radical transparency'.

3. Open learning systems need to promote the freedom to innovate, and therefore the freedom to fail. One of the world's most innovative companies, 3M, is content that 50 per cent of its inventions fail to make it to market. How many school systems would be allowed such freedom? Fear of failure paralyses schools and system leaders and is our biggest innovation killer.

4. Most importantly, they prioritise autonomy and trust. Much has been said about the achievements of the Finnish education system, usually countermanded by the limited transferability of its lessons to less homogenous cultures. Their insistence upon trust in the profession and the autonomy that accompanies that trust (Sahlberg, 2011) could be adopted by any country, however.

OPEN will win

Jonathan Rosenberg, Senior Vice-President, Google, stated the following in 2009.

Our goal is to make open the default. People will gravitate towards it, then they will expect and demand it and be furious when they don't get it. When open is intuitive, then we have succeeded ... Open will win.

The clamour for a return to 'the basics' (literacy and numeracy) offers a misguided notion that there was once a golden age of literacy. If there ever was such a time then it was before

governments began to call the shots. In 1850, before compulsory schooling was legislated in the United States, literacy rates in the state of Massachusetts were 99 per cent. In 2003, they were 90 per cent. In 2013, English 16–25 year-olds' literacy levels were tested. This is the generation that was subject to intense pressure by the then Labour government to improve literacy levels. After ten years of scripted interventions, including a daily compulsory 'literacy hour', they were found to be less literate than their grandfathers.

So, if it appears that calling for open learning systems seems somewhat radical, let us not forget that the fixation with getting the basics right has not exactly been an unqualified success.

In the debate on publicly accountable school systems, I believe we have reached a critical point. As an industry, education is no different to any other, facing the immense challenges of a disintermediated, fragmented, yet socially connected, future. As an 'institution', government-led education bears similarities to the concept of universal suffrage. Both were always seen to be an unchallenged, essential entitlement. Young people, however, increasingly fail to see the point of voting, or of learning formally, and they have discovered other, more dynamic routes to both political activism and self-improvement. Tinkering with standards and structures will not win them back. As Charlie Leadbeater has noted,

> *Education has to reclaim its sense of purpose and the belief that it stands for something more than getting good grades.*

(Leadbeater, 2014)

It is just possible that an alliance between primary and secondary educators (parents and teachers), amplified through the voices of the students on the receiving end, may finally get

the message across to governments – desperate to effect breakthroughs but not knowing what else to do – that we need some new ideas around here. I believe open learning systems may help to address those demands.

In 1975, a Kodak employee invented the world's first digital camera, but the company's leadership refused to embrace the shift to digital, convinced that people would only settle for high-quality film and print. Their mission was to 'preserve memories' and they could not see any other way to do it. In 2010, the Instagram app was launched. Designed to make editing and 'sharing the world's moment' as fast, and easy, as possible, through the use of social media. Instagram were not interested in preservation, but in communication and collaboration. In 2012, Kodak filed for bankruptcy; in 2014, Instagram was valued at $35 billion.

'Open', as a way of working, and living our lives, is winning. It is time we applied it to education.

Endnotes

1. www.childhelplineinternational.org/media/57468/chi_briefing_paper_bullying.pdf

2. www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap2.pdf

3. www.befrienders.org/suicide-statistics

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5. www.businessinsider.com/bill-gates-bots-are-taking-away-jobs-2014-3?IR=T

   www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/515926/how-technology-is-destroying-jobs/?utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_source=newsletter-daily-all&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20130613

6. www.avaaz.org/ – Avaaz is described in Wikipedia as follows. 'Avaaz is a global civic organization launched in January 2007 that promotes activism on issues such as climate change, human rights, animal rights, corruption, poverty, and conflict; it works to 'close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want' (Avaaz website, About Us). The organization operates in 15 languages and claims over thirty million members in 194 countries.'

7. www.38degrees.org.uk/ 38 Degrees is described in Wikipedia as follows. '38 Degrees is an independent British not-for-profit political-activism organisation that campaigns on a wide range of issues. It describes itself as 'progressive' and claims to 'campaign for fairness, defend rights, promote peace, preserve the planet and deepen democracy in the UK' (38 Degrees website, About Us). In October 2013, it was reported to claim 1.9 million UK members.'

8. See, for example, #satchat - a weekly Saturday morning Twitter gathering of teachers, with its Australian counterpart #satchatoc

9. www.aitsl.edu.au/learning-frontiers

10. Speech given to Ark School 30th November 2011

11. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-31087137

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Other publications

Leading the education debate Volume 3: Selected papers from the CSE's Seminar Series and Occasional Papers, 2007–2010 (2011)
Editors Vic Zbar and Tony Mackay

This third collection from the CSE Seminar Series and Occasional Papers has contributions from a number of significant contemporary and international education writers. It comprises 15 papers on school improvement and reform, and is organised in five parts: The challenge of implementation; Leadership remains key; Improving classroom practice; Disciplined innovation for improved systems and schools; and A system that engages educators, students and the community.

Volume 3 of *Leading the education debate* continues the sequence of volumes of collections of CSE papers. The two earlier volumes by the same editors, *Leading the education debate* (2003) and *Leading the education debate Volume 2* (2007), are also available from CSE.

Women in school leadership: Journeys to success (2010)
Compiled by Jim Watterston

Twelve women reflect on their personal and professional journeys to school leadership, the barriers they have overcome, the successes they have achieved and what they have learned along the way. Their experiences and advice provide inspiration for any teacher who might aspire to school leadership.

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About the author

David Price, OBE, is Director, Educational Arts, in the UK. He is also Co-Founder, We Do Things Differently and Senior Associate at the Innovation Unit. He is the author of OPEN: *How We'll Work, Live and Learn In The Future*, Crux Publishing, 2013.

About the Paper

The author argues that the political, organisational and philosophical discourse surrounding formal learning is becoming ever further detached from the lessons we see when learning happens outside formal boundaries. This detachment, he believes, is reaching a crisis point, whereby the consumers and stakeholders involved in formal learning are actively looking to informal solutions. He contends that if we want to re-engage learners – who increasingly focus their learning beyond the school, particularly through the use of social media – re-professionalise teachers, and re-think how we prepare students for a globally competitive working life, we need to follow the learners, and develop more open learning systems.

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